

Alexandria Small Business Guide



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1 Introduction

Congratulations on establishing, or considering establishing or expanding your small business in Alexandria. The City recognizes that small businesses are the backbone of our local economy. It is dedicated to assisting you as you start your new business within the community.

No doubt you have put a lot of thought into how your business should look and function, and now it is time to begin the implementation process. For many, understanding the City's vision for its commercial areas and obtaining the necessary approvals is new and unfamiliar. It needn't be.

This guide is designed to help you navigate the licensing and permitting system and to answer many of your questions. It does not replace or supercede city ordinances and regulations. We have provided you with an overview of the process and the most frequently asked questions. One handbook cannot answer every question, so we have provided phone numbers of key contacts to make the process easier.



You have chosen Alexandria for your business because of the City's setting and economic viability. Buildings are safe, businesses are vital, neighborhoods are attractive and the quality of life is good. The City has established standards and regulations to ensure a quality City and to protect your future investment. In general the required approvals include:

- **Zoning Approvals** - required to ensure that the type of business and the building are appropriate to the neighborhood. Other permits may be required for specific business types, such as a restaurant, or if the business is located in an historic district.
- **Building Permits** - required to assure conformance to the State and local health and life-safety requirements.
- **Sign Permit** - required for exterior signs
- **Business License** - required to operate a business in the City. This also raises tax revenues to help fund City services.
- **Occupancy Permit** - ensures that all of the required improvements have been met and the building is ready for your new business.

The City has spent much of the last two years working jointly with small businesses, especially in the Arlandria neighborhood retail corridor, where it has begun an innovative program of technical assistance to businesses. This program is being expanded to other retail corridors, including Mt. Vernon Avenue and King Street, and throughout the City. The City is also establishing an Office of Business Assistance which has been designed as a centralized source for City information and problem-solving regarding business requirements and procedures in Alexandria. Staff is available to answer your questions and direct you to the appropriate office for your specific needs. Office of Business Assistance: 703.838.4227.

In addition to these resources at the City, there is also the Alexandria Small Business Development Center (SBDC) that can help you start, manage or grow your business. Assistance is provided through individual consultation, educational materials and resources, workshops, and referrals to other services or businesses. SBDC: 703.778.1292.

This Guide is structured as a companion to the Business Resource Directory, which is prepared by the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, Inc. (AEDP). The Directory provides additional details regarding taxes, employer requirements, business support organizations and local, state and federal resources. AEDP: 703.739.3820.

This Business Guide is organized to provide you with an overview of the process and then to answer the questions about:

- *Finding the Appropriate Location for Your Business*
- *Obtaining a Business License*
- *Obtaining Planning Approvals*
- *Obtaining a Building Permit*
- *Obtaining a Sign Permit*
- *Obtaining a Certificate of Occupancy*
- *Expanding/Modifying Your Business*
- *Identifying Contacts and Resources*



2 Overview



The following are the five primary steps to receive approval for a new business in Alexandria:

1. Determine the Business' Type of Ownership

The requirements for business registration depend upon the type of business ownership. The most common forms of business entities are: Sole Proprietorship, General Partnership, Limited Partnership, Limited Liability Partnership, Limited Liability Company, and a Corporation.

2. Register Your Business with the State

All businesses must be registered with the State. If the business is a foreign or a domestic corporation, a limited liability corporation or limited liability partnership, you must register with the Virginia State Corporation Commission. Per State business registration, contact the Clerk of the Alexandria Circuit Court: 703.838.4044.

3. Apply for a City Business License

All businesses must have a valid business license. New businesses should apply at the City Business Tax Branch at City Hall: 703.838.4680.

4. Obtain City Zoning Approval

All businesses must comply with zoning requirements before conducting business in the City. Depending on the location and the type of business, the types of approvals may include: Zoning Review, Special Use Permit, Board of Architectural Review, Sign Permit. Contact the Department of Planning & Zoning: 703.838.4666.

5. Ensure Compliance with City Building Code Regulations

New businesses must obtain Building Permits for construction and interior improvements from the Code Enforcement Bureau. Depending on the type of business and the building, the approvals may include Health Department approval. Contact the Code Enforcement Bureau: 703.838.4360.

5. Obtain a City Certificate of Occupancy

New businesses must obtain a Certificate of Occupancy from the Code Enforcement Bureau: 703.838.4360.

Consult the Business Resource Directory for more information on the first two steps.

General questions about where to go in the City can be answered by the Office of Business Assistance: 703.838.4300.

Overview

Finding the Right Location for Your Business



The first step is finding the right location for your business within Alexandria. You will need an address to apply for a business license. For that reason we are beginning this Guide with questions about finding a business location.

I would like to locate a small business in Alexandria. Whom should I speak to first?

First you might want to speak to AEDP or a commercial real estate broker. AEDP maintains an inventory of available property within the City and can provide you assistance. To be sure that your type of business (i.e. office, retail restaurant, etc.) is allowed at the location that you have tentatively selected, check with staff at the Department of Planning & Zoning to verify the zoning and parking requirements.

To be sure that the building you have selected is building-code compliant and meets health and life-safety requirements, check with the Code Enforcement Bureau.

The City's recently created Office of Business Assistance can answer questions on City policies, and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) can help identify financing alternatives and sales and marketing approaches.

Planning & Zoning: For questions regarding zoning, parking requirements, signs, historic districts and Special Use Permits.

City Hall
301 King Street, 2nd floor, Rm. 2100
703.838.4666

Code Enforcement: For questions regarding building suitability, certificate of occupancy, inspections and permits.

City Hall
301 King Street, 4th floor, Rm.4200
703.838.4360

TIP: Take down the name, direct phone number and email address of the person you speak with at each department. Then, if you have additional questions later, you can email or speak to someone who is already familiar with your business.

Why should I reveal details about my business to the City?

The City's interest is that both you and your business succeed. It is important that your small business get a healthy start by receiving the best possible information on how to implement your business plan in Alexandria.

The City staff's job is to make sure that you're on the right application track, and to assist you in completing your application as rapidly as possible. In order to help you, they do need to know the basics of your business.

Location

4 Obtaining Your Business License



New businesses must apply to the City Business Tax Branch of the Department of Finance at City Hall for a business license.

How do I obtain a business license?

Once you have established an address for your business in Alexandria, you can apply for a business license. To get started on your business license application, contact the Business Tax Branch Office.

There are two main forms every business needs to complete—a business license application and an interdepartmental approval form. These forms may be obtained at the Business Tax Branch on the first floor of City Hall.

Approvals must be obtained from the Department of Planning & Zoning and Code Enforcement Bureau on the interdepartmental form prior to issuing the business license. In many cases, the Department of Planning & Zoning will confirm that your business is a permitted use and that you have enough parking on site. In the case of home occupations, the Department of Planning & Zoning will approve all home-based businesses that meet the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. Code Enforcement will let you know what sorts of permits you will need and will sign off on the interdepartmental form once you have applied for a Certificate of Occupancy.

Contact:

Business License Office
301 King Street, Rm. 1410
703.838.4680

What type of documentation is required, and is there a fee?

Certain businesses that must have a special state certification or state-issued licenses, such as doctors, attorneys, and restaurant owners (if beer or alcohol is served), should provide this documentation with their applications. Contractors must also submit a Virginia Worker Compensation Commission form.

In addition, approvals may also be required from other agencies listed on the interdepartmental approval form, depending on the type of business. For example, if the business is operating under a trade name, this name must be registered at the Clerk of the Alexandria Circuit Court. Restaurants, personal grooming, massage therapy and other businesses may require special Health Department permits. If your business has multiple uses, a separate business license must be approved for each separate business activity. For example, a beauty salon offering haircuts may also sell hair products. Therefore, licenses would be issued for both personal services and retail.

As a requirement to obtain a business license, every person beginning a business is required to make an estimate of the amount of gross receipts he or she expects to receive by the end of the current license year, and pay taxes on that amount. Thus, if you apply after January 1, your tax will be based on your estimated gross receipts for the remainder of the calendar year in order to receive your business license. Business license tax revenues are used to fund city services such as police and fire services.

Busi

Is the process different for businesses with Special Use Permits (SUP)?

A Special Use Permit (SUP) from the Department of Planning & Zoning is required for restaurants and other businesses that may impact adjoining properties or the neighborhood. If an SUP is required, the process is somewhat different. First, the SUP must be approved by the City Council, and if there are any necessary steps to comply with your SUP conditions, they must be completed before a business license can be approved. Usually, businesses already operating under SUPs will have their business license approved at the same time the Certificate of Occupancy is issued. This is also true if you are applying to take over the ownership of a business that is governed by an SUP.



Historic American Buildings Survey, Christ Church



Business License

5 Obtaining Your Planning Approvals



A planner at the Department of Planning & Zoning's front desk, City Hall Room 2100, will assist you in determining if your type of business is appropriate under the zoning code for the area in which you want to locate. The planner can also review with you any zoning conditions, parking requirements or other types of approvals that may be required. For instance, if your proposed location is located within one of the City's historic districts, or requires a permit for a special use (such as a restaurant, entertainment venue, dry cleaners, etc.), you may need additional approvals.

How can I tell if the building in which I wish to locate can be used for my business?

The Department of Planning & Zoning staff will assist you in determining if your business is appropriate for the zone in which your proposed building is located. They will also advise you of any zoning requirements or special permits that may be required. To ensure that the existing building can meet the health and life-safety codes for your business type and location, you should contact the Code Enforcement Bureau.

For example, even if the area you have chosen is zoned for retail use, the particular building you wish to lease may need to meet certain safety standards. Occasionally, it is necessary to bring a building up to current code requirements. Code Enforcement staff can provide the necessary information to allow you to assess what kind of investment you will need to put into a particular building in order to open your business at that location.

TIP: Establishing an early working relationship with the Code Enforcement Bureau will facilitate your application for a Certificate of Occupancy.

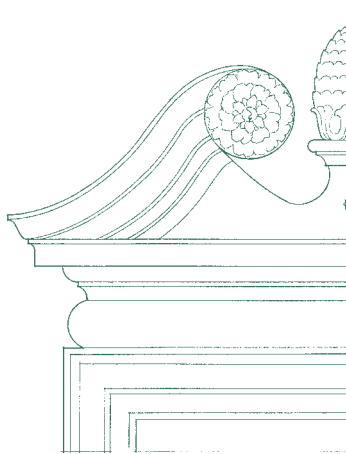
How can I determine the parking requirements for my business?

The Department of Planning & Zoning staff will assist you in determining the specific parking requirements for your business. Parking requirements vary for different types of businesses and for different locations within the City.

If you cannot meet the parking requirements for your particular use and location, you may apply for a Special Use Permit for a parking reduction. The process will be the same as for the SUP process outlined below.

Are there special regulations for businesses in an historic district?

Yes, studies have documented the importance of historic districts in contributing not only to the character and integrity of an area, but to its economic viability as well. Analysis has shown that the careful conservation of historic areas brings significant benefits to owners within the designated district. The conservation of the area is provided for by a review which ensures that all new construction and renovation fit within the historic context. The Department of Planning & Zoning staff will assist you in determining if your proposed location is within one of the City's historic districts. In general, historic district regulations do not affect the management of your business, but pertain to the external appearance of the building in which you are located. For example, all exterior changes made to the building—including signs, awnings, replacement doors/windows, and security features such as gates and bars—will go through a design review public hearing before the Board of Architectural Review (BAR).



Historic American Buildings Survey, Carlyle House

There are two architectural review boards which deal with proposed changes in the City's historic districts. They are the BAR for the Old & Historic Alexandria District and the Parker-Gray District BAR.

- The BAR for the Old & Historic Alexandria District generally meets twice a month. It meets once a month in July and August. 703.838.4666.
- The BAR for the Parker-Gray District meets once a month. 703.838.4666.

Typically, the filing deadline for a BAR application is about a month before the hearing date. As a business owner, it is important to understand that these exterior changes must be approved before any work permits are issued or work begins. Since timing is important to a new business owner, take note of the following two tips.

TIP: Determine all the exterior changes you would like to make (signs, changes to building facade, canopies, mechanical equipment, etc.) and submit them at the same time. This will provide the BAR with a comprehensive application and assist in expediting your approval.

If you also require a Special Use Permit (see below), your BAR application can proceed at the same time as your SUP.

Do I need to contact the City if I am buying an existing business?

Yes, you do. If you are taking over an existing business which is permitted in that location, you will usually need to get permits only for modifications you may plan. Further, you will need to obtain a new business license. These procedures are described in this document.

If, however, you are taking over a business which requires a permit from the Health Department or which is operating under a Special Use Permit, you should discuss your plans with the Department of Planning & Zoning.

What is a Special Use Permit (SUP)?

Typically, an SUP is required for businesses such as restaurants, beauty salons, fitness studios, dry cleaners or other businesses that need special review because they have the potential to create noise, odors, fumes, pollution or significant parking impacts. The process is designed to ensure that potentially affected neighbors are both informed of, and are provided an opportunity to comment on, the proposed business. The Department of Planning & Zoning staff will assist you in determining if a SUP is required.

If your business does require an SUP, you must complete an application check-list and file an SUP application with the Department of Planning & Zoning detailing how the business will operate. Your application will be heard at two public hearings: one before the Planning Commission, followed by one before the City Council. The City Council will make the final decision.

Generally, it takes up to two or three months to review and process your SUP application to the public hearings. Applications received in April and May will be heard in September since the City Council does not meet in July or August.

TIP: If you need an SUP, your schedule should reflect the necessary time for filing and for the two public hearings.

How do I start the SUP process?

The Department of Planning & Zoning staff are assigned to assist you. They will explain the process and help you with your filing. If you need specific help, we urge you to request a preapplication conference. At this meeting, a planner can go over the application with you and answer any questions. The planner can also point out any additional materials which may be needed to supplement the application and identify any initial issues that you may want to address.

Once you have filed an application, the Department of Planning & Zoning staff and staff from other departments, such as Transportation and Environment Services (T&ES) and Code Enforcement Bureau, will analyze your application. The Department of Planning & Zoning will incorporate all comments into a report which will go to the Planning Commission and the City Council.

How do I prepare for the public hearings?

It is best for you to meet with your neighbors and concerned citizens well before your Planning Commission hearing date. The Department of Planning & Zoning staff will provide the necessary contact information.

The Department of Planning & Zoning will prepare a staff report prior to the hearings that analyzes your application and may recommend conditions to lessen any areas of impact. The Planning Commission and the City Council will hold a public hearing as part of the approval process. It is important that prior to the hearing you meet with the Department of Planning & Zoning staff, to review the staff report and understand the recommended conditions. The Department of Planning & Zoning staff will provide the staff report or you can access it on the City's website: www.ci.alexandria.va.us. Click on the link to the Department of Planning & Zoning and then to the Planning Commission docket.

TIP: It is best to meet with your new neighbors prior to your hearing. Having the support of your new neighborhood can not only help your public hearings go more smoothly, but will create the type of goodwill which leads to business success.



What happens if I purchase a business governed by a Special Use Permit (SUP)?

Since the purpose of a Special Use Permit is to ensure business-use compatibility within the community, the same type of questions will be asked of the new owner of an existing business governed by an SUP. You will fill out a change of ownership application for the Department of Planning & Zoning.

On this application, you will indicate any changes you may plan to make. This application will be reviewed internally by other city departments and a report will be prepared. Also, the proposed change in ownership will be advertised in the newspaper so that nearby neighbors and others will be made aware of the application.

Typically, most approvals are handled administratively by the Department of Planning & Zoning staff. If, however, you intend to make substantial changes to the business operations, your application might need to go through public hearings before the Planning Commission and the City Council to gain approval.

TIP: Typical administrative approval takes about six to eight weeks, while the public approval process may take 75 days.

Early discussions with Planning staff can provide you with a reasonable estimate of the time and the issues you may encounter. You may wish to have this discussion before you finalize your purchase offer.

What are the rules for “Home Occupations?”

In general, the rules for Home Occupations are designed to ensure that the house is perceived as a residential use, not a commercial use. These rules are meant to ensure the integrity of the neighborhood and reassure the neighbors next to you.

Home-based businesses are permitted in Alexandria with limitations. These include:

- No signage indicating a business at the home
- No loading or unloading or storage of contracting materials or equipment
- No clients or customers, with the exception of students—limited to 12 students a day
- No employees, except those who live in the home
- Only one commercial vehicle (under 1 ton) is permitted, and must be parked in the driveway or garage

Some of the most common types of home occupations include offices, contractors and businesses providing services at other locations, such as consultants and housekeepers.

TIP: Check with the Department of Planning & Zoning Office if you are considering a home office.

Do I need a ‘sign permit’ and what are the regulations?

Yes, your business will need a sign permit. All signs will first be reviewed and approved with a sign permit, which can be applied for at the Code Enforcement Bureau.

Three agencies will review your sign permit. The Department of Planning & Zoning will look at the size and design of signs, while the Code Enforcement Bureau will look at the structural details, such as the method of attaching a sign to a wall or the base of a freestanding sign. Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES) will ensure that there are no pedestrian or car safety issues that would result from the proposed sign.

In general, signs can be placed on building walls facing a street, alley or parking area, and in some cases, freestanding signs are permitted. Signs affixed to building walls in commercial areas generally cannot exceed one square foot for each foot of building width along that wall. Therefore, a building with a 100-foot-long wall could have one sign that is 100 square feet, or two signs of 50 square feet each, totaling 100 square feet, and so on.

If the business is located in an industrial area, you may be able to increase the maximum sign area allowed by 50%. In addition to placing signs on building walls, signs can also be placed in windows. Any window signs, however, can only take up 20% of the entire window area and count towards the total area of signage along that building wall. (For example, that 100-foot-long building wall could have an 80-square-foot sign on the wall and 20 square feet of signs in the windows, totaling 100 square feet).

Planning

Freestanding signs are only allowed on larger lots where buildings are set back at least 25 feet from the front lot line. The number and size of signs allowed depends on the number of businesses located on the lot.

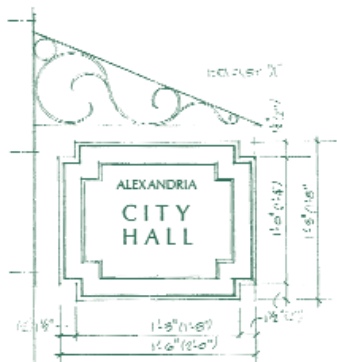
TIP: If you are in a shopping center or other development with multiple businesses, gain approval from the property owner before submitting your sign permit application, since they may have design requirements of their own.

Are there areas with special sign regulations?

Yes. Signs in the historic district need Board of Architectural Review approval before a sign permit can be issued. In some areas such as Mount Vernon Avenue and the northern portion of Old Town (referred to as Old Town North), special design guidelines have been developed that must be followed. No signs are permitted for any home occupations.

Are there some signs which are illegal?

Yes. There are some signs for which no permits are issued because they are illegal everywhere in the City. Some examples of these signs include: banners (other than those specially approved for a grand opening or going out of business; and moving or windblown signs, including balloons!), and signs advertising your business that are not on your property.



May I put up a "Grand Opening" sign?

Yes, you may. Congratulations, your permits and Certificate of Occupancy (CO) have been approved and you are about to open your doors! One good way to advertise your new business—especially if your permanent sign is not installed—is to put up a grand opening sign or banner. Approval for this sign is obtained from the Department of Planning & Zoning. You will need to fill out a temporary grand opening sign permit in which you will outline the following:

- The dates the sign will be up (a maximum of 30 days)
- The dimensions of the sign (the sign cannot exceed one-half square foot of area for each linear foot of building wall where the sign will be located; i.e., a 50-foot-long building wall could have a sign no bigger than 25 square feet.
- The name and address of the business, as well as other relevant contact information.

Applications are made through the Department of Planning & Zoning: 703.838.4666.

TIP: If you decide to open a bit earlier or later than expected and want to change the dates your grand opening sign is up, call the Department of Planning & Zoning and ask to revise your grand opening sign permit. The dates for the 30-day permit period may be changed.

What do I do if I want to display goods outside or host a special event?

If you decide to have a special outdoor display, such as a sidewalk sale, at your business, you will need to get a temporary outdoor display and storage permit from the Department of Planning & Zoning. This type of permit can be issued to you up to four times a year. In addition, outdoor displays are approved for a maximum of seven days at a time. Before granting a permit, the Department of Planning & Zoning staff will evaluate your plans for an outdoor display to make sure there are no safety issues and that the display will not disrupt car and pedestrian traffic.

If you are planning a special event or festival, you may need to get a special permit from the Health Department. For example, if your event involves serving food outside, you will need a special Health Department permit, even if you already have a permit for your normal food-related operations. These permits are generally processed within two weeks.

TIP: There is a Special Events Committee in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities which can assist you if you are planning a festival or special event.



6 Obtaining Your Building Permits



To obtain your building permit(s), you or your designee must apply at the Code Enforcement Bureau for the work you are planning on carrying out. You and your business may be eligible for the City's One Stop Shop, a process for expediting permits.

What building permits are required?

The permit system has been designed to protect you and your new business. It ensures that you are in compliance with health and safety codes and safeguards your customers and clients.

A variety of permits exist for the different types of work you may be doing, including: construction, mechanical, electrical, plumbing and sign permits. In addition, if there is a sprinkler system in your building, you may also need to obtain a fire protection system permit.

Certain businesses, such as cleaning companies, restaurants, nail salons, print and copying shops and other places where chemicals are stored and/or more than fifty people may congregate at any one time, will require fire prevention permits from the Fire Marshall's office.

TIP: Before any construction or utility work can be done at your new business location, you must obtain the necessary permits for the work you need to do. Starting any type of work before getting a permit can result in a stop work order and an administrative fee from the Code Enforcement Bureau.

Contact:

Code Enforcement
301 King Street, Rm. 4200
703.838.4360

What has the City done to make it easier for small businesses to get building permits?

The City has established an expedited process —called One Stop Shop—for small businesses going into existing space and making only minor improvements. If your business meets this definition, it may be possible to go through the City's One Stop process and get your building permit within one hour. To determine eligibility, call Code Enforcement Bureau and describe the work you will be doing.

These one-stops are done by appointment every Wednesday morning. If you are eligible, bring in four sets of drawings, signed and sealed by the engineer who prepared the plans, which show your proposed improvements.

TIP: Make sure that the design professional who prepared the plans can attend the One Stop appointment, since some changes may need to be made. If they are present, any issues can be cleared up right away, helping to speed up your approval!

Are there certain permits which must be acquired first?

Yes, there are two instances where you must get approvals before applying for building permits at Code Enforcement:

- If you are located in an historic district and need BAR approval, you must get that approval first.
- If you need any permit from the Health Department, you must get that approval before applying at Code Enforcement.

Building

As owner of the business, am I the only one who can sign for building permits?

No. Construction permits may be issued to property owners, licensed contractors, lessees, architects or engineers. Contractors must possess a state license and an Alexandria business license, or be registered as a reciprocity contractor with the City's Business Tax Branch. For plumbing, electrical and mechanical trade work, the master tradesman must sign the permit application.

Tip: Remember, a permit becomes invalid if work is not begun within six months of issuance. You may apply for a one-time extension which is valid for six months. To extend your permit, contact Code Enforcement Bureau. Expired permits cannot be extended.

How do I get started with the building permitting process?

You or your contractor/architect can get started by visiting the Code Enforcement Bureau and filling out the necessary applications for the particular work you will be doing. Four sets of plans will be needed for review. If your work must be reviewed by the Health Department, five sets will be needed).

An engineering aide will go over your plans and application with you and let you know what other departments will need to review them. Generally, most applications will be reviewed by the Department of Planning & Zoning and Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES), although depending on your location and the type of work performed, it may occasionally be necessary to gain the approval of other departments, such as Archaeology or the Health Department.

What kind of turnaround time can I expect? And, when do I pay the fees?

Construction applications for new construction, additions to existing buildings, alterations, and renovations usually take an average of 20 working days to be approved, while some minor tenant work can sometimes be approved the same day.

When applying for permits, you must pay 20% of the fee upon submittal and the balance once the permit is approved. Plumbing, mechanical, and electrical applications must be signed by a master tradesman, and fire protection system permits must be certified and sealed by an engineer licensed in Virginia to perform this service.

TIP: To make sure you know what information needs to be provided, contact the Code Enforcement Bureau and let them know what type of work you will be doing. You can also preview and print out permit applications online.

Are there restrictions on when my contractor can work?

Yes, there are. Work on Sundays and holidays is prohibited. Work can occur Monday-Friday 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. If you need to work outside of these hours, you must first obtain a noise permit from the Division of Environmental Quality of T&ES.

Contact:
Division of Environmental Quality: T&ES
301 King Street, Rm. 3900
703.838.4334

When is a Health Department permit required?

A Health Department permit will be required if, for example, you operate a hair/nail salon, a massage establishment, or a business that involves food. A health permit application must be submitted before the Health Department will review any building, mechanical, or electrical permit applications for your business. The Health Department will then inspect your business periodically to ensure proper procedures are being followed.

Contact:
Health Department:
Environmental Health Division
517 N. St. Asaph Street, 2nd Floor
703.838.4400 ext. 254

Why do I need inspections and how do I request them?

The City will require periodic inspections to ensure that what you have applied for is what is being built. It is also the only way to verify that you are in compliance with the permit that has been issued. The inspectors act on your behalf and that of the City to ensure the safety of your business and your building. Think of them as a second set of expert eyes to oversee good performance by your workers.

Once work has been completed, the person whose name is listed on the permit application must contact Code Enforcement Bureau for necessary inspections. At minimum, a final inspection is needed for each permit issued.

Once an inspection is scheduled, make sure that the address is posted, the permits and approved plans are on site and that the job foreman or contractor will be present for the inspection. Please note that even if all of your work has been approved through a final inspection, you will still need a certificate of occupancy inspection before opening your business.

Permits

7 Obtaining Your Certificate of Occupancy



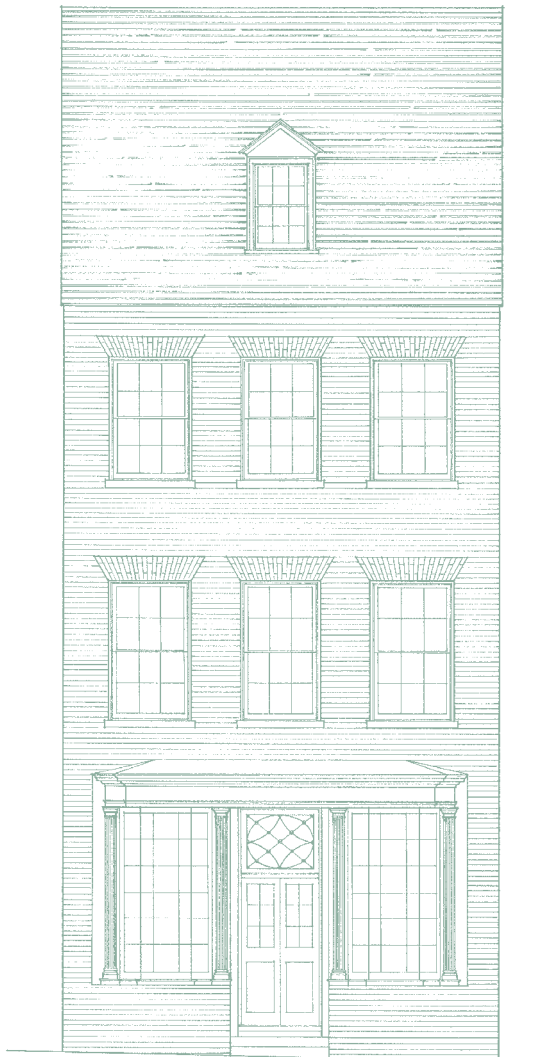
How do I obtain a Certificate of Occupancy?

Once you have obtained all of your necessary permits and have successfully completed the work, Code Enforcement Bureau will issue a Certificate of Occupancy (CO), allowing the business to open.

To get a CO, you will need approval from Code Enforcement Bureau, the Department of Planning & Zoning, Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES), and possibly the Health Department (if your business involves food, child/adult care, medical services, massage therapy, or nail/hair care). If you are operating under a SUP, you must be in compliance with the conditions placed on your business by the City Council before receiving your Certificate of Occupancy (CO).

Almost without exception, all business owners will need to get a CO when starting or taking over a business in Alexandria. If you do not think you need a CO before opening or taking over a business, it is still a good idea to call the Code Enforcement Bureau ahead of time to be sure.

TIP: It is recommended that you allow a two week cushion between the time construction is completed and your grand opening is scheduled so that any issues can be addressed and your CO can be issued in a timely manner.



8 Expanding or Modifying Your Business



In general, the process for expansion and/or modification is a more targeted process than the one for opening a new business.

May I add a new use to my business?

Of course you may, but there are notifications you must give. If you are considering the addition of a new type of service to your business, check with the Department of Planning & Zoning and Code Enforcement Bureau in the initial planning stages to see if this new service or use will be allowed at your location (just as you did when you first opened your business). This will let you know whether you can begin to offer this new service right away, or if you need to apply for an SUP.

Depending on the new service you are proposing, you might have to obtain different permits than you have in the past. For example, if you operate a retail store, and are now planning to offer coffee, snacks and a seating area, you will need to get Health Department approval and permits—something you may not have dealt with in the past.

TIP: Once you gain approval for adding this new use or service from the necessary departments, an additional business license must be obtained for this use, since every type of business use in which your company engages will require a separate license.

What happens if I change the address of my business?

If you decide you would like to operate your business in a new location in Alexandria, you should begin by calling Code Enforcement Bureau and the Department of Planning & Zoning to determine whether the location you are considering allows your type of business before signing a lease. You will need a new business license that reflects your updated address and will likely need to obtain the necessary permits and a CO before moving into the space.

What happens if I change the legal structure of my business?

As your business grows and changes, it may be necessary to change the way it is legally structured. For example, you may wish to include someone else in the ownership of your business, changing it from a sole proprietorship to a partnership. If you wish to change the legal structure of your business, you will need to apply for a new business license. If you are governed by an SUP, there may be additional issues to consider. Contact the City's Business Tax Branch and the Department of Planning & Zoning if you have any questions.



Expansion

9 City Resources

The contact information for City departments that have key roles in Alexandria's licensing and permitting process is provided below. Departments are open between 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. during the week to answer any questions you may have. In addition, each department has more information available on the City's website, at www.ci.alexandria.va.us.

Office of Business Administration (Scheduled to open in January 2004)

Where to begin and which City offices to contact.

301 King Street, Room 3630
703.838.4227 Fax: 703.838.3991

Department of Planning & Zoning

SUPs, historic districts, zoning information, parking requirements, outdoor displays and signs.

301 King Street, Rm 2100
703.838.4666 Fax: 703.838.6393

Code Enforcement Bureau

Building suitability, certificate of occupancy, inspections, and permits.

301 King Street, Rm 4200
703.838.4360 Fax: 703.838.3880

Business Tax Branch

Licenses and taxation.

301 King Street, Rm 1410
703.838.4680 Fax: 703.519.3418

Health Department

Environmental Health Division

Businesses needing health permits such as restaurants, personal grooming, massage therapy, etc.

517 N. St. Asaph Street, 2nd Floor
703.838.4400 Fax: 703.838.4038

Transportation & Environmental Services -

Division of Construction & Inspection

Review of building, sign, and other permits.

301 King Street, Rm 4130
703.838.4324 Fax: 703.838.6348

Division of Environmental Quality

Construction hours as well as noise, air, and water pollution issues.

301 King Street, Rm 3900
703.838.4334 Fax: 703.838.6348

This guide has primarily focused on the City of Alexandria's business licensing and permitting process. The following contacts can offer assistance with other issues affecting the start-up, management, and expansion of your business.

Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP)

1729 King Street, Suite 410
703.739.3820
www.alexecon.org

The Alexandria Economic Development Partnership is a public/private partnership between the City of Alexandria and the business community. AEDP provides general business assistance, information regarding available real estate, and economic and demographic statistics. This organization can assist you in finding an available business location in Alexandria.

Alexandria Chamber of Commerce

801 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 402
703.549.1000
information@alexchamber.com
www.alexchamber.com

The Alexandria Chamber of Commerce promotes business interests through lobbying efforts on the local, state and national levels. The Chamber also offers programs and services for firms wanting to promote and expand their business base.

Alexandria Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

801 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 402
703.778.1292
info@alexandriasbdc.org
www.alexandriasbdc.org

The Alexandria Small Business Development Center provides counseling on starting, managing and growing a business; maintains a small business resource library; and refers small businesses to appropriate resources and training opportunities.

Business Associations

Several business associations exist within different geographical areas of the City. These associations meet regularly to discuss common interests and concerns, network, promote business development; and undertake special projects and events. Some of these associations include:

Potomac West Business Association

P.O. Box 2125
703.836.1155
www.pwba.org

Resources

The Eisenhower Partnership

2121 Eisenhower Avenue, Suite 200
703.684.5124
info@eisenhowerpartnership.org
www.eisenhowerpartnership.org

King Street Metro Enterprise Team (KSMET)

109 N. Henry Street
703.548.2878

Old Town Business Association

205 The Strand
703.684.0580

Arlandria Community Businesses

3805 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Suite 5
703.684.5697

Arlandria Business Association

3805 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Suite C
703.527.4938



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
Department of Planning and Zoning
301 King Street, Room 2100
Alexandria, Virginia
703.838.4666
www.ci.alexandria.va.us

January 2004

